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MUERTOS CIVILES: MOURNING THE CASUALTIES OF RACISM IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Abstract

Black Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Reconoci.do movement often state that denationalization policies in the Dominican Republic have caused their muertes civiles, or civil deaths. Although Reconoci.do’s members organize to fight against their figurative deaths, their struggles are not limited to a fight for legal recognition. They also fight for survival in the context of higher rates of death as a direct result of systemic racism and social exclusion. Drawing on two years of ethnographic research in the Dominican Republic, this article explores resistance to the deaths of Black individuals who form part of a large-scale movement against statelessness. I engage Christina Sharpe’s analysis of “wake work” in order to examine “Black people’s ability to everywhere and anywhere … produce in, into, and through the wake an insistence on existing” (2016, 11). I analyze Reconoci.do’s activism as wake work to interpret the movement’s manifestations of resistance to death by racism. [racism, activism, death, blackness, stateless]

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Dominican Republic’s Constitutional Tribunal denationalized 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent, officially rendering stateless four generations of people who had been previously legally recognized by the Dominican government. By claiming that the children of undocumented Haitian migrants were not entitled to birthright citizenship, the Dominican Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling 168-13, commonly known as La Sentencia, cemented a decades-long process of denying darker skinned “Haitian-looking” individuals the right to vote, work, legally wed, or purchase homes. Black Dominicans of Haitian descent active in the Reconoci.do movement often state that these denationalization policies have caused their civil deaths, muertes civiles. Reconoci.do—which means “recognized” in Spanish, and also refers to the URL for the movement’s online web page—has organized and trained themselves to fight against their figurative deaths and yet are often plagued with the literal deaths of the movement’s members and their families. Their struggles are not only a fight for legal recognition but also survival in the context of higher rates of death as a direct result of systemic racism that excludes Black Dominicans of Haitian descent from the Dominican state.

No voy a descansar, aunque me quede en el camino, porque yo sé que la lucha seguirá. Algun día, tarde o temprano, el Estado tendrá que reconocer estas ciudadanas y ciudadanos que crecen aquí apátridas, sin nacionalidad, sin un nombre, para que sean incluidas en la sociedad dominicana.

I will not rest, even if I do not make it to the end of the road, because I know the struggle will continue. Someday, sooner or later, the State will have to recognize these citizens who grow up here stateless, without a nationality, without a name, so they may be included in Dominican society.1—Sonia Pierre

Drawing on two years of ethnographic research in the Dominican Republic, including participant observation and interviews with Haitian Dominican activists, I explore resistance against the figurative and literal deaths of Black individuals who form part of a large-scale movement against statelessness in the Dominican Republic. Through an analysis of Reconoci.do’s activism, this article highlights how the members of this particular movement are constantly living with death and the forms of resistance developed in the process. I engage Christina Sharpe’s analysis of “wake work” in order to examine Black people’s ability to “everywhere and anywhere … produce in, into, and through the wake an insistence on existing” (2016, 11). Sharpe employs wake work as a “conceptual frame of and for living Blackness in the diaspora in the still unfolding aftermaths of Atlantic chattel slavery” (2016, 2). I position this project...
and Reconoci.do’s activism within the wake and as wake work that allows for the interpretation of the movement’s different manifestations of resistance to death by racism. Through this wake work analytic (Sharpe 2016), Reconoci.do is imagining new ways of living despite Black death.

I have chosen not to abbreviate or hyphenate Black Dominicans of Haitian descent as leaders within the different organizations led by and advocating for the rights of Black Dominicans of Haitian descent have made explicit that this is what they felt best identified them. Some of the members were second-, third-, and fourth-generation Dominicans whose ties to Haiti varied across families and generations. Furthermore, as the leaders of the Movimiento de Mujeres Domincano-Haitiana (MUDHA) explained to historian April Mayes (2018, 157), the term Dominico-Haitiano does not exist as a legal category because dual citizenship is not an option for Dominicans of Haitian descent. Dominicans of Haitian origin also implies a naturalization process, which is not the case for Dominicans of Haitian descent. Finally, although not all Dominicans of Haitian descent are racially categorized as negro or negra, Black, in the Dominican Republic, the members of the movement specifically highlighted how Blackness became a marker of racial difference in addition to their last names and ancestral connections to Haiti. In emphasizing their Black and ethnic identity, I am also acknowledging that these two categories, Black and Haitian, are not always synonymous.

RECONOCI.DO’S FIGURATIVE DEATH

Founded in 2010, Reconoci.do is considered the first organized movement of young Black Dominicans of Haitian descent resisting a series of denationalization policies and rulings, which have rendered many of them stateless in the Dominican Republic. While several well-known organizations addressing the rights of Dominicans of Haitian descent have existed since the 1980s, these were often led by small-scale non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Reconoci.do’s leaders would often state “we are a movement, not an NGO (nosotros somos un movimiento no una ONG),” emphasizing their determination to exist regardless of the support or resources that outside funders might provide and their commitment to the movement. They saw their work as long term and transformational and were committed to the political education of their members and the communities they came from and worked in.

The Reconoci.do movement was organized into zones comprised of several nuclei responsible for organizing communities within the six different regions of the country where they worked (Figure 1). The movement was led by a small committee (petit comité) that was responsible for the day-to-day work of the movement at the national level. This small committee was responsible for budgeting, as well as the development of a yearly calendar of activities, which included organizing national coordination meetings as well as community meetings to discuss denationalization policies and statelessness. They were also responsible for external affairs including regularly scheduled meetings with international supporters and national-level ally organizations. Additionally, Reconoci.do participated in the organization of mass rallies to make visible the number of stateless individuals affected by the Dominican government’s denationalization policies and joined other national-level movements fighting against government corruption and advocating for health rights. Reconoci.do was also actively involved in international and regional court cases and hearings at the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) and organized transnational meetings with afrodescendiente (African descent) movements throughout the Latin American region to raise awareness and develop anti-racist strategies in unison.

The bulk of the members’ time, however, was spent accompanying Dominicans of Haitian descent to government offices responsible for their civil deaths by denying them their identity documents. Reconoci.do’s members accompanied mothers with newborn children to hospitals where the management had denied them a white paper certificate (certificado de nacido vivo) confirming the child’s birth and Dominican nationality, as opposed to a pink paper certificate that would label the child a foreigner. This certificate was necessary in order to register the child’s birth with the local offices of the Central Electoral Board (Junta Central Electoral, JCE). Reconoci.do also accompanied young Black Dominicans of Haitian descent to the JCE where they were often denied copies of birth certificates or national identification cards (cedulas) by administrative officials who flagged what they referred to as “strange sounding last names” (apellidos raros).

Reconoci.do’s leaders were well known in their communities and often expressed a great sense of responsibility over the lives of their members, family, and community. In addition to their core work
demanding that their Dominican nationality be restored, Reconoci.do’s leaders became known in their communities as resources for issues beyond documentation. They supported their elders in advocating for their pension funds as retired sugar cane workers and accompanied the sick and injured to hospitals. They organized community clean-up days, fundraising events, and movie nights.

It was in this context that I first came to conduct research and support the work of Reconoci.do. On one particular morning, as we prepared for the first of many meetings the Reconoci.do movement would hold on that day, Minerva the movement’s coordinator, remarked: “Lately there are a lot of deaths, every week there are deaths (Ay! últimamente hay muchas muertes, todas las semanas hay muertos).”

Minerva’s remarks came after a week filled with news of death, including that of the movement treasurer’s father. Julio’s father was a diabetic who had migrated to the Dominican Republic twenty-five years earlier to work in the sugarcane fields. He had just returned home to Haiti for the first time and passed away during his visit. Julio’s father was buried in Haiti, never again to be seen by Julio because Julio did not have the necessary documents to cross the border without risking his return home to the Dominican Republic.

The physical death of individuals who were close to the movement, such as Julio’s father, were usually discussed in passing during Reconoci.do’s meeting breaks in which fundraisers (colectas) to provide financial support for the families of the deceased occurred. During scheduled meetings the movement prioritized what they considered to be the more pressing matters and its primary goals, addressing the civil genocide (genocidio civil) they were facing as the children of Haitian migrants. For Reconoci.do, a civil genocide meant the en masse erasure of their Dominican nationality and rights as citizens (Belique Delba 2018). Reconoci.do often used the term muerte civil (civil death) to describe the way in which the Dominican government had rendered them stateless. When asking Reconoci.do members what being civilly dead meant to them, they often described feeling like...
ghosts (fantasmas) or, as one leading Dominican of Haitian descent explained, “[the Dominican government] has turned us into zombies like the ones from the [AMC television series] The Walking Dead, who don’t exist for the educational system, the health system, or the formal economy."\(^5\) As stateless individuals, Black Dominicans of Haitian descent were not legally recognized by the Dominican government and were often stripped of or denied identity documents. They were vulnerable to racial profiling by immigration officials who would demand identification cards and in some documented cases were expelled to Haiti if they did not provide the required documents.\(^6\) Oftentimes, Reconoci.do’s leaders discussed how they felt as if they did not belong in either country.\(^7\) They referred to themselves as zombies because they did not exist legally and were not allowed access to government services, yet their physical presence as Black individuals made them highly visible, undesirable, and dangerous within a Dominican society that had marked them as Haitian and did not accept their claims to a Dominican identity.

**ON BEING HAITIAN AND BLACK: HYPERINVISIBILITY**

Race scholars of the Dominican Republic have noted that approximately 90% of Dominicans are of African descent (Moya Pons 2010; Torres-Saillant 1998). This figure is often cited to highlight the nation’s Blackness and African influence in Dominican culture. It has also supported claims by government officials, such as current President Danilo Medina, that racism does not exist based on the country’s racial composition.\(^8\) These data are limited, however, in their ability to explain the ways in which color and race are understood and experienced in the Dominican Republic (Howard 2007).

Kimberly Eison Simmons notes that race and nation in the present-day Dominican Republic are born out of processes in which Dominican identity “means having a generational presence, roots, and mixture (liga) that is particular to the Dominican Republic” (2009, 117). Eva Michelle Wheeler’s study (2015) highlights how some physical characteristics comfortably fit into ideas of a Dominican identity, while other physical characteristics are pushed to the periphery. In Wheeler’s study, participants were asked to select images of individuals that they most closely associated with Dominican identity. Wheeler details that the images most often selected as representative of a typical Dominican were described as negro (black) or moreno (brown) for men, and morena and mulata (of mixed black and white parentage) for women. Wheeler’s study elucidates how Blackness and Black identity are not seen as incongruent with Dominican identity. It also shows how Black Dominicans of Haitian descent with physical appearances that are not seen as typically Dominican become vulnerable to racial profiling and racial discrimination.

Furthermore, state-sanctioned categories of race and politically motivated anti-Haitian sentiment continue to shape ideas around Blackness and Haitianess in the country (Candelario 2007; García-Peña 2016; Mayes 2014). Up until 2014, women were reporting that JCE officials were requesting that they straighten their hair before taking their photo for their ID cards.\(^9\) JCE administrative officials were very much complicit in the process of defending the nation and creating proper citizens. Members of the movement spoke of the myriad ways in which their bodies were policed by state institutions. Becoming proper patriotic Dominican citizens was often wrapped up in discourses of respectability with regard to bodily performances and enactments of Dominicaneness that, when not done properly, could label one a Haitian. The policing and surveillance of such behaviors and actions occurred through the profiling of skin color and last names as well as in the forms of dress and hairstyle and projections of proper [white] Dominican femininity (Ramírez 2018).

During one of the Reconoci.do regional meetings held in the community center in the El Seibo province, the participants discussed how they would dress whenever they had to pay a visit to the regional JCE. Through nervous laughter Reconoci.do members commented that in order to visit government offices and not be misrecognized as a Haitian national, they could not wear bright colors such as green or orange. They also made sure they wore business attire in order to be taken seriously and not speak their parents’ language, Haitian Kreyol, in public. At times, however, even these markers of respectability that could aid in their passing as non-Haitian Dominican subjects were not enough. Angela, a member of Reconoci.do recalled a time she went to her local grocery store (colmado) to grab a few items when a man entered the store and warned her that immigration officials were in the area with la camioneta, the vehicle used by immigration officials to detain individuals they have profiled as Haitian and therefore undocumented. Angela recalls just staring at the
young man in confusion, as it took her some time to realize that he was warning her because he saw her as an undocumented Haitian woman. The young man responded “I’m just helping you (solo te estoy ayudando)” as if, in Angela’s words, she was being an ungrateful woman (malagradecida) for not having thanked him for the warning. Angela’s Dominican identity was illegible to this man because she was a darker skinned Black woman with natural coarse hair that he perceived as Haitian, and therefore an undocumented “deportable subject” (Boyce Davies and M’Bow 2007; Smith 2016).

Scholars of the Dominican Republic have challenged assertions that constructions of race and the hierarchies that have resulted out of this process in the Dominican Republic are somehow exceptional. They have noted that Blackness within the Carribean is at all times mediated by its contact with European colonizers (Candelario 2007; García-Peña 2016; Simmons 2009; Thornton and Ubiera 2019). In particular, Thornton and Ubiera (2019) emphasize the urgent need to expand scholarship on the Dominican Republic beyond questions pertaining to race and nation, noting that the processes in place with regard to race and particularly Blackness are no more exceptional than those that have resulted in other parts of the world through the emergence of colonization, slavery, and the rise of plantation societies throughout the Caribbean.

While I agree with Thornton and Ubiera in asserting that the racial logics at play in the Dominican Republic are not exceptional, we might benefit from transforming the questions posed with regard to race and racialization in the Dominican Republic by placing them in conversation with scholarship on race and nation building projects situated at the intersections of the local and transnational. Ana Maurine Lara’s imperative, for example, that we ask instead “Why have we naturalized anti-Blackness as an element of the modern nation-state?” or “What does Blackness look like in the Dominican Republic?” (2017, 471) would allow us to acknowledge how Black people in the Dominican Republic have historically engaged in hemispheric Black politics, while asking difficult questions such as why these notions of Blackness have continued to exclude darker skinned Haiti-looking Black Dominicans of Haitian descent from the Dominican nation. Scholarship addressing race and nation in the Dominican Republic must provide space for the Black political narratives present since the inception of the state, even in the face of myriad attempts to construct a non-black Dominican identity, while also imagining and querying the social processes that have led to anti-Blackness as an element of the modern nation state, its impact on Black communities, and its relationship to larger historical and contemporary transnational processes. By paying closer attention to the dialectical relationship between state-sponsored and grassroots conceptualizations of race and racial self-presentation, we begin to see how Blackness and Black identities are imagined and contested. Through the work of scholars such as Deive (2013), Ricourt (2016), and Abréu (2014), we see that the Dominican Republic is “an important site of transnational black cultural production and exchange” (Thornton and Ubiera 2019, 417). State-sponsored discourses, however, continue to strategically employ Blackness in constructions of a national identity, while making Black Dominicans, and particularly those of Haitian descent, invisible.

In the case of the Dominican Republic, Telles and Paschel (2014) found that individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to identify with darker categories throughout the racial/color continuum compared to individuals with lower levels of education. In other words, Dominicans with higher levels of education who might be referred to as indio claro (light skinned) by other Dominicans were more likely to call themselves mulatto or Black. This does not mean, however, that high-status individuals who choose to identify in darker categories experience the same level of racial and/or color discrimination experienced by individuals who are identified by the rest of society as Black or Haitian. Identification with darker color categories reflects a contestation to the national narrative that seeks to negate Blackness. I argue that it is also a privilege afforded by a lighter skin middle class status often associated with these higher educational levels, in which the stakes for social exclusion based on color are lowered.

Although there is a growing Afro-Dominican movement, these spaces—oftentimes led by academics and non-governmental organizations—reified, perhaps unintentionally, the exclusion of Dominicans of Haitian descent by marking them as Haitian and therefore a distinct class of Black person. While participating in an event held in the Centro Cultural de España, Spain’s Cultural Center in Santo Domingo, titled Voces de Mujeres Afro, Voices of Afro-descendant Women, in July 2017, a fellow panelist implied that Ana María Belique
Delba, a well-recognized leader of the Reconoci.do movement, would be best positioned to speak about immigration. While many Reconoci.do members would not deny their Haitian ancestry, and often spoke of the difficulties their migrant parents have faced in the Dominican Republic, Ana Maria and other Reconoci.do members often objected to the implications of being called Haitian in spaces deemed Dominican. Although Ana Maria was not a migrant, her Haitian ancestry was linked to immigration and inadvertently positioned her as an outsider during the conversation focusing on the voices of Afro-Dominican women. Dominicans of Haitian descent were marked as Haitian and therefore non-citizen and non-Dominican, not only by government offices but also in spaces dedicated to uplifting Dominican Black identities. It was these unintended forms of exclusion that often cascaded into the larger Dominican society and their interactions with Black individuals perceived as Haitian.

Encounters such as the one experienced by Ana Maria and Angela made members of the Reconoci.do movement keenly aware that the refusal to recognize the children of Haitian migrants as Dominican citizens went beyond their access to national identity documents. Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Reconoci.do movement spoke at great length of the ways in which they were made to feel that they did not belong as they navigated social spaces in the Dominican Republic. Their Blackness and Haitianness marked them as hypervisible subjects who were vulnerable to deportation, while at the same time they were also rendered invisible as Black citizen-subjects (Smith 2016). As stateless individuals, they were constantly maneuvering and resisting the deaths enacted through racist policies and institutional practices.

SLOW AND PAINFUL DEATHS
Reconoci.do spent long hours in community- and national-level meetings discussing advocacy and legal strategies to fight against their symbolic death. During manifestations held in front of the JCE headquarters, Reconoci.do would often bring a coffin symbolizing their deaths as Dominican nationals. Upon observing and participating in Reconoci.do’s work, however, it quickly became evident that the struggle and figurative deaths they were experiencing went far beyond identity documents. Their struggles were also for the right to survive within a Dominican society whose rejection of them for being children of Black Haitian migrants had become lethal (Figure 2). Although Reconoci.do’s meeting agendas prioritized the development of strategies to fight against their erasure as Dominican citizens, they were inevitably tasked with the development of quotidian practices of resistance for their corporeal survival. Reconoci.do’s struggle against their muertes civiles was inextricably linked to their daily struggles and resistance against a government that was equally invested in their biological deaths.

The biological effects of racism led to the “slow death” (Berlant 2007) of Black communities. Not only are Black people in places like the Dominican Republic more vulnerable to violent deaths due to structural racism, but they are also more likely to die because, as Orisanmi Burton notes, “Race impacts the quality of air we breathe; the levels of toxins we are exposed to; the quality of food we have access to; and the likelihood that we will develop chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, cancers, and HIV.”

According to the UNCHR, the United Nations Refugee Agency:

Without any nationality, stateless persons often don’t have the basic rights that citizens enjoy. Statelessness affects socioeconomic rights such as: education, employment, social welfare, housing, healthcare as well as civil and political rights including: freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary detention and political participation. When thousands of people are stateless, the result is communities that are alienated and marginalized.
It is no surprise, then, that Black Dominicans of Haitian descent living in sugar cane communities (bateyes) have the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in the Dominican Republic. Approximately 80.9% of the children of migrants—of which the majority are of Haitian descent—do not have access to health insurance. The biological effects of racism also increase the likelihood that Black bodies will experience psychological and emotional trauma (Gravlee 2009). In the Dominican Republic, trauma stemming from structural racism is compounded by trauma from living as a stateless person. In its most recent visit and report on the human rights situation in the Dominican Republic, the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights noted that “the loss of self-esteem and the profound trauma frequently experienced by stateless persons have been extensively documented … each episode of discrimination, rejection, [and] negation is part of their memories and makes it difficult for them to move forward in any area of their lives.”

Angela often spoke of the first time she was denied a copy of her birth certificate as traumatizing. “I have been through so much I might as well be eighty years old,” she once chuckled after telling me about her uncle’s death. Angela’s family had experienced a series of illnesses and deaths over the past year. Dealing with this most recent death had been difficult for Angela’s family because they did not have the means for a proper burial. Angela’s uncle had died the night before, but her mother and her two siblings were the only ones there to watch over the body for the wake that night. At first, Angela did not understand why they had not called her until the next morning, but she quickly realized that if they had started telling people about her uncle’s death, they would have had to start buying tea and coffee to offer visitors. It was this same concern that led Angela a year later to not publicly share the news of her younger brother Armando’s death.

It was Angela’s younger brother’s death that proved how much the members of the movement had become family for one another. Angela’s brother passed during Angela’s much-awaited trip to the United States. As I was one of the few people Angela knew in the United States, she kept me informed of her trip and shared details regarding her visit. It was with much surprise and sadness that I answered her call the morning after she arrived. Her teenage brother had passed only a month after realizing that he had developed a tumor in his kidneys, which had metastasized. I worked with Angela to find the quickest flight back home, but she could not make it back quickly enough and missed her brother’s burial. The limited resources and access to a morgue meant that bodies were buried within twenty-four hours before entering a state of decomposition. It became Minerva’s job to oversee the funeral and burial.

During a conversation with Minerva regarding Armando’s death, she stated, “I transformed into Angela (me transformé en Angela).” Minerva went on to say that in Angela’s absence she became the big sister that Angela was for her family. Angela asked Minerva to watch over her mother the same way that she would. Minerva felt great responsibility to ensure that everything would go the way that Angela would have wished. Minerva and members of the movement became responsible for organizing Armando’s wake. They prepared meals and purchased the necessary items: coffin, coffee, tea, sugar, and rum. The rum, Minerva explained, was necessary in order to keep watch over the body until dawn when he was buried.

**COMMERCIALIZING DEATH: LO ÚNICO QUE UNO TIENE SEGURO ES LA MUERTE**

Angela often lamented not having funeral insurance for her uncle or brother because she believed it would have made the situation easier. Funeral insurance, ironically, had become a survival mechanism for the unexpected, yet imminent, deaths of family members. “The one thing that is sure to happen is death (Lo único que uno tiene seguro es la muerte)” was a phrase commonly used by individuals during conversations. Vincent Brown points to this idea of being “ull de [the] same” in his discussion of mortuary rituals in Jamaica’s eighteenth-century plantation society (2010, 3). He points to the power of death for enslaved Africans as in death their European slave masters became their equals. Death for the enslaved symbolized power and the continuation of their transition into the After World and being undead (Hurston 2009). Brown notes, however, that these burial rituals also reaffirmed the social status of the deceased.

Brown’s affirmation that in death slave masters and the enslaved become equals spoke to the idea that enslaved Africans recovered their humanity through their deaths. Yet, even at this moment in which our corporeal being is at its most vulnerable state, social hierarchies can once again be reinforced. A Reconoci.do ally who had been supporting the development of the
movement’s communications strategy laughed at my suggestion that perhaps in our deaths we would all meet the same fate. He suggested that perhaps I was right in one sense, but according to him, there were cemeteries where only the rich in their coffins accompanied by their families could enter. In other words, these social hierarchies were so entrenched in Dominican society that they continued to be reinforced even at the moment of death.

While many of Reconoci.do’s members lacked the identity documents necessary to access quality health care, it was not uncommon to hear that they or a family member were enrolled in funeral insurance. The fear of not being able to provide proper funeral rites had led many who had experienced the death of family or friends to enroll. As the executive director of a youth group and Reconoci.do’s leaders stated, what was once a communal practice in small rural areas that would establish a rotating fund for funerals had become big business. “Death has been commercialized (Se ha comercializado la muerte),” she said. At a minimum, the insurance would cover the costs of the deceased person’s casket, the plastic chair rental for attendees, sugar, coffee, ice, and water. These funeral insurance plans were tiered, guaranteeing more amenities based on the plan chosen. Perhaps this could also be interpreted as the state and corporations’ way of saying that Haitian migrants and their Dominican children are better business dead. Statelessness represented a profitable space of death for the Dominican state and the corporations who benefited from this invisible labor force.

In discussing the importance of theorizing the political and epistemic dimensions of Blackness transnationally, Orisanmi Burton notes that the demands of anti-racist movements such as #BlackLivesMatter are not only for the disavowal of Black dehumanization but also fundamentally a critique of capitalist modernity. Katherine McKittrick (2014) refers to the mathematics of Black life to elucidate how the enslavement of Black Africans led to a set of calculations in which Blackness emerges through their state of non-being. According to McKittrick, “The documents and ledgers and logs that narrate the brutality of this history [of slavery] give birth to new world Blackness as they evacuate life from Blackness” (2014, 16). Thus, Blackness and Black life are represented in slavery’s archives through financial accounts and ledgers, in which profitability did not require an acknowledgment of the enslaved person’s humanity. This profitability is extended into the present-day experiences of Black Dominicans of Haitian descent who find that their civil deaths represent a profitability for the Dominican state as they determine the terms under which their labor can be exploited, without granting them citizenship (Martínez and Wooding 2017). This set of calculations has also led to the exploitation of their grief.

The death of Black Dominicans of Haitian descent had become profitable, perhaps even more so than guaranteeing health insurance. For most Black Dominicans of Haitian descent, access to health insurance required providing a series of identity documents that they did not have access to. As the national coordinator of the Alianza por el Derecho a la Salud explained, even in instances where an individual might have access to the publicly funded health insurance, CENASA, they can only visit hospitals that would take this insurance. Furthermore, the premiums required to maintain health insurance were costly and often did not cover the required medications. As one of Reconoci.do’s leaders stated, “Funeral insurance is as important or more so than health insurance (el seguro de funeraria es tan importante o más que el seguro de salud).” As the Reconoci.do leader explained, with as little as one hundred Dominican pesos (approximately two US dollars) a month in 2018, you can ensure that your family member will have a dignified wake and burial.

Christina Sharpe asks:

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying; to tend to the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means work. It is work: hard emotional, physical and intellectual work that demands vigilant attendance to the needs of the dying, to ease the way, and also to the needs of the living (2016, 10).

When speaking to Minerva about my intrigue with regard to funeral insurance, she explained the importance of a dignified death. She shared with me her personal experience with the burial of a Haitian migrant who had become sick after the Haiti earthquake in 2010 and that she was responsible for his burial. She explained the pain she felt burying this man whose name she had never learned. By the time he had arrived in Santo Domingo from the border, he could barely speak. It pained Minerva that she was never able to tell his family that he had died. Despite this
tragic end to his life, she talked about the importance of providing him with a dignified burial. Even though the process she undertook with the support of the organization she was working for at that time was costly, it was important that his burial was handled with care. Minerva was responsible for signing his death certificate, purchasing his coffin from a funeral business, and getting the necessary permissions for his burial in the cemetery.

Billboards and posters promoting funeral homes were commonplace throughout the city of Santo Domingo. Pamphlets promoting local funerals and their latest insurance packages were often slipped under people’s doors. These pamphlets usually listed all of the benefits of burying their loved ones in one of the cemeteries associated with their business. One particular pamphlet stated that the funeral complex Parques del Prado could provide “a dignified ambiance to honor your loved ones.” Another funeral home, Funeraria La Solucion in El Seibo, shared their Black Friday deals for coffins online. Funeraria La Solucion’s coffins were on sale for up to 75% off their original price. The narrator in the commercial states: “It’s a deal to die for.”

Guaranteeing that your loved ones would have the proper funeral and burial were of great importance for many of Reconoci.do’s members. Funeral insurance guaranteed that they would have the financial resources available to bury their dead. Individuals without funeral insurance could find themselves at the mercy of a local politician who would provide a funeral car and a casket, as long as his face was prominently displayed on the ambulance or hearse. The support of a local politician was also based on the beneficiary’s ability to vote for said politician in future elections. This meant that for the most part, Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent who had been denied their citizenship documents could not access the same support from local politicians. The limitations created by lack of documentation had led to the development of Mutual Associations such as AMUTRABA in 1996, which allowed Haitian workers in bateyes to pay approximately one hundred pesos per month for health and funeral services provided by the non-governmental organization Socio-Cultural Movement of Haitian Workers (MOSCTHA). As a result of this investment, MOSCTHA would provide the members of AMUTRABA with a coffin or funds to cover the funeral expenses for themselves and anyone in their families under the age of eighteen. One afternoon, I sat with Joseph Cherubin, MOSCTHA’s executive director, in his Santo Domingo office to better understand the goals of AMUTRABA. Cherubin explained that AMUTRABA emerged out of a need to ameliorate the many funeral expenses Haitian migrant workers faced when they experienced the death of a loved one. Participation in mutual associations (gremios) was common throughout rural areas of Santo Domingo. Their goal was to reduce the amount of debt owed by Haitian migrants while also ensuring a dignified death. Cherubin explained that in years prior to the development of AMUTRABA it was common to hear of Haitian migrants who would have to use old wooden doors from their own homes to create makeshift coffins. Not being able to provide a proper coffin for your dead created a sense of shame. As I asked questions about the importance of having a dignified funeral and burial, I often heard of the importance of having a coffin that showed that the deceased was loved and cared for. It was these concerns that led members of Reconoci.do to try to create a fund that would support its members during times of need. The movement had not been very successful in raising funds for this purpose, but they often referred to all of the circumstances in which such a fund would have supported a Reconoci.do member or their family.

While Reconoci.do did not have a mutual support fund, they had found other ways to support one another during times of need and in the face of physical deaths. One of the most recent deaths was Miriam’s. Miriam was actively involved in the movement for many years. Most recently, Miriam had joined Reconoci.do’s Muñecas Negras (Black Dolls) project in which women of the movement had created a space to share their painful stories, including their intimate encounters with administrative officials in hospitals who refused to acknowledge their Dominican identity. They shared their experiences of discriminatory practices based on their skin color and hair texture, all while sharing laughs and reimagining themselves through the creation of Black dolls. They welcomed Black women visiting from Puerto Rico and forged ties with an Afro-Brazilian teacher who identified the value in providing these workshops for women she saw herself reflected in. For many of the women in the movement, it was an opportunity to interrogate what it means for them to live as Black Dominican women of Haitian descent in the Dominican...
Republic, a state in which the remnants of a colonial past (Ramírez 2018) continue to perpetuate a patriarchal culture imbricated in questions of race and gender. Through these interrogations, the women of the movement were engaging in wake work (Sharpe 2016). Through “this gathering, this collecting and reading,” the women of the movement were “plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death” and “tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially” (Sharpe 2016, 13).

I sat next to Minerva, while she stitched together a Black doll and talked about Miriam. Minerva remembered how she and Miriam had been two of the three women arrested during one of their first public demonstrations. Even though Miriam had been ill for some time, she continued to participate in the Black dolls project. Minerva and Angela had missed the funeral, but in remembrance of Miriam they had created a space during their Saturday workshops to memorialize her. They sang songs to remember her and created a doll, which they named Miriam.

I return here to Sharpe’s question, “What does it mean to defend the dead?” (2016, 10). Despite the profitability of funeral services, Reconoci.do’s activism and care for their dead exemplify what Sharpe refers to as the praxis of the wake and wake work. “Despite Black death,” Black Dominicans of Haitian descent are able “to think and be and act from there” (Sharpe 2016, 22). Foucault (2003) argues that racism is the technology that allows for the emergence of biopower and the sovereign state’s ability to determine who lives and who dies. Despite the necropolitics of the state, through their power and ability to “subjugate life to the power of death” (Mbembe 2003, 39), Black Dominican activists of Haitian descent have carved out spaces “to care for, comfort, and defend, those already dead, those dying and those living consigned to the possibility of always-imminent death” (Sharpe 2016, 38). It is this “wake work,” as a counter to biopower, that leads the members of Reconoci.do to cumplir with the dead. There is no direct translation for cumplir in this sense, but it marks a sense of commitment to the dead, a fulfillment of a promise that challenges the state’s control over their legal and corporeal existence. It is this sense of commitment to the dead and dying that leads the Black Dominican activists of Haitian descent from the Reconoci.do movement to continuously fight back against these imminent deaths. In the following section, I highlight how ghosts and zombies emerge not only as a symbol of civil death but also as entities that embody the possibility of life.

**GHOSTS, ZOMBIES, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE**

Christen A. Smith highlights the inability of global epistemological frameworks to locate Black people within the realm of the human “refusing to recognize black people as coeval, dynamic, political subjects whose lives matter” (2016, 112). This ontological refusal of Black humanity pushes the debate beyond a question of citizenship and state recognition. Smith argues that “Black people become conceptually distant from citizenship in the popular imagination because they are ghosts—invisible subjects relegated to the realm of either the dead or the nonhuman” (2016, 112).

Black Dominicans of Haitian descent often referred to themselves as zombies and ghosts. These metaphors were often employed when discussing how their lives had been paralyzed or suspended as they waited for their identity documents to be returned. The zombie is someone who has lost their soul, trapped in a body that has lost all autonomy (Glover 2010; McAlister 2012). Jennifer Rutherford historically positions zombies within Haiti and explains that becoming a zombie requires living death:

> Once zombified, the victim is permanently exiled from society, dead to all prior relations, and bound over to toil endlessly, casting them back into the abjection of the slave condition. Thus the zombie is a figure that doubles the trauma of the past. It signifies a past that awaits; a past to which one can always be returned if, through transgression, one loses the right to being an individuated subject in a free society” (2013, 34).

To be a zombie or ghost is haunting. In thinking about the zombie, I cannot help but hear the fear that such a figure has on Black Dominicans of Haitian descent. They are children of Haitian migrants who have grown up hearing these stories. But in many ways, they are also thinking about the zombies their parents have been turned into through their ceaseless toiling on Dominican sugar cane plantations—the same ceaseless toiling that many of their enslaved ancestors had also been
subjected to. As a Black activist of Haitian descent explained during a conversation, it was cheaper for the Dominican government to let Haitian guest workers stay on the sugar plantations than to pay for their repatriation home. While the Dominican government sought to whitewash the Dominican population through a series of policies, there were also economic interests at hand that demanded the availability of cheap labor. Amelia Hintzen (2014) describes the extralegal practices implemented by the Dominican authorities that coerced Haitian migrants into remaining or relocating to sugar plantations during the 1930s and 1940s. Hintzen notes that by withholding immigration documents the Dominican government sought to make sugar plantations the only legal spaces for Haitians to reside and work (2014, 111). Passports and other forms of identity documents became part of the “racializing surveillance” apparatus that allowed for the reification of race, which in turn led to “discriminatory and violent treatment” (Browne 2015, 8). The sugar plantations symbolized spaces of political, economic, and social enclosure for Haitian migrants and their descendants. Accord- ing to Samuel Martínez (2012), beginning in the 1970s human rights institutions began to take note of the human rights violations against Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic. The social conditions in which many migrants working as sugar cane cutters found themselves led these human rights advocates to refer to the situation as de facto slavery.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes slavery as “a ghost, both the past and a living presence … something that is and yet is not” (1995, 147). Bateyes and sugarcane plantations where time becomes suspended are representative of these hauntings. The state machinery that has turned their parents and ancestors into zombies is now trying to do the same to them. While at times the references made to zombies by members of the movement and Dominicans of Haitian descent seemed more closely related to American zombie films and programs that have made zombies fixtures of popular culture, they were also closely tied to the stories many Black Dominicans of Haitian descent learned about through their parents and great grandparents. I once asked Minerva to explain why she referred to another member of the group as a zombie. Her voice hinted at a slight nervousness that seemed to have been prompted by my question. She gave my question some thought and then answered:

In our [Haitian] culture they are beings that exist only corporally, not in spirit because they have taken everything that he has inside. They are directed by others, in other words, they go where they are taken, in other words a stronger force, and they are beings that do not govern themselves. They are beings that exist and don’t exist. As Dominicans of Haitian descent we exist but we don’t exist legally.

En nuestra cultura [haitiana] son seres que existen sólo en cuerpo no en espíritu porque les han sacado todo lo que tienen dentro. Son dirigidos por otros, o sea, van hacia donde los dirigen, o sea una fuerza mayor, y son seres que no se gobiernan a sí mismos. Son seres que existen y no existen. Como dominicanos de ascendencia haitiana existimos pero no existimos legalmente.

As stateless Black individuals, Dominicans of Haitian descent live with the possibility of being forever relegated to what Orlando Patterson (2018) has referred to as social death, a condition of physical, psychological, and cultural alienation that affected the enslaved and, many would argue, continues to claim Black lives. And yet, as Patterson notes, social death “could coexist with agency, cultural creativity, and occasional rebellion.” Despite Reconoci.do’s use of ghosts and zombies to symbolize their civil deaths, these metaphors also signify the possibility of life. They are ghosts and zombies who are not dead. There is the chance that if one is recognized as a zombie, the person does not have to stay in that state. Zombies can still be recognized. The zombie then symbolizes a return to a traumatic past, while also allowing for a different future. As Aisha Khan notes, “The Caribbean space of death is, on the one hand, viewed as a site of death in the literal terms of genocide, labor abuse, and disease. On the other hand, it is viewed as a site of life in the metaphorical terms of regeneration, continuation, and constancy as it takes on other forms of being and diverse modes of interaction” (2018, 255).

The possibility for regeneration has led many of the movement’s leaders to ask what would happen if they all received their ID cards and were recognized by the government as Dominican citizens. Would the anti-Blackness and anti-Haitian sentiment they experienced vanish? Would they no longer be deemed suspicious at security checkpoints and asked to present their documentation? Would the physical and emotional trauma they
had experienced suddenly disappear? These were the questions that lingered after Reconoci.do’s community meetings. These questions become part of Reconoci.do’s wake work analytic (Sharpe 2016). Their experiences as non-citizen subjects exemplified the afterlife of slavery. These interrogations, however, sought to rupture and “imagine otherwise from what we know now in the wake of slavery” (Sharpe 2016, 17). Many Black Dominicans of Haitian descent were beginning to gain access to some form of Dominican identity documents. Even though the movement often warned that these new forms of identification invalidated their original documents, the excitement to finally work, go to school, get married, and possibly travel had led many of the movement’s members to diminish their participation in community activities. The leadership of Reconoci.do began to discuss more explicitly how racial discrimination extended beyond citizenship. The lack of recognition as Black Dominicans of Haitian descent meant that they would continue to be seen as stateless subjects if they did not continue their anti-racist activism. Angela, who had been hearing concerns over the movement’s ability to remain relevant as more young Black Dominicans of Haitian descent accessed their identity documents responded by saying:

Our sense of struggle must continue … We must continue to join forces for what is coming … the [government ruling] was like an open sore something that came as a virus to bring us down, but today we do not allow ourselves to be so easily trampled, today I can say my last name is Pie and I do not feel embarrassed, or be embarrassed that my mom goes outside with a headwrap, or to speak [Haitian] creole in public. Do not faint, do not get tired … Reconoci.do is the body and we the members are its organs.

Nuestro sentido de lucha tiene que seguir … Nosotros debemos continuar aunando fuerzas para lo que ha de venir … esa [sentencia] fue como una llaga que vino como un virus para tumbarnos, pero hoy no permitimos que nos pisoteen tan fácilmente, hoy yo puedo decir Pie y no siento vergüenza, o de que mi mamá lleve un pañuelo en la cabeza, o de hablar kreyol en público. No nos desmayemos, no se cansen … Reconoci.do es el cuerpo y nosotros sus miembros somos sus órganos.

In other words, Reconoci.do was the embodiment of their struggle. Each member of the movement, imagined by Angela as the organs, played a vital role in the movement. The survival of the movement depended on the well-being and involvement of all its members. They could not have resisted and fought back against the state if it were not for the life each one of them breathed into the movement symbolized as the body. As individuals, they would have faced certain literal and figurative death. As a movement of more than five hundred members, they were resisting and surviving. The members of Reconoci.do breathed life into the movement and allowed it to take on the full human form that the colonialist epistemological legacy of liberal conceptions of the human (Wynter 2003), and thus the Dominican state, wanted to deny them. The movement has supported them in their quest for their Dominican identity documents but has also helped them through the physical and psychological effects of this war on their bodies and communities. Reconoci.do had emboldened its members enough to no longer fear speaking Haitian Kreyol in public and to be proud of their history, connecting their current and future struggles to that of their Haitian ancestors. In spite of the climate of anti-Blackness that Dominicans of Haitian descent constantly face, they are able to produce “their own ecologies,” allowing them to move through “these environments in which the push is always toward Black death” (Sharpe 2016, 106). Accessing identity documents had only been one step along the way toward their path toward full recognition. The Dominican government could not provide healing from the psychological trauma they had faced. The members’ active participation in the movement facilitated this form of healing (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Reconoci.do members join hands in prayer during regional meeting. Photo courtesy of Jacqueline Lyon. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
These acts of resistance were often not told by Reconoci.do’s network of transnational supporters. The need to speak about their own stories of symbolic death and survival led the movement to develop the storytelling and writing workshop. At the opening of the workshop, Minerva asked the participants how many of them had met scholars who had traveled from outside of the country to meet and learn about their struggles. Almost all of the hands in the room were raised. She then asked, “How many of you have seen or read the stories that these scholars have written? How many of you have seen these scholars ever again?” Few hands remained. Minerva stood at the front of the room and stated, “It is time for us to tell our own stories.”

Minerva had encouraged the development of this writing workshop to ensure that the stories of the different members were told as they wanted them to be told (Figure 4). The workshop did not establish any requirements with regard to topics, but what emerged was a web of stories, each one detailing moments of resistance to death by racism. These were fragments of individual lives and yet these stories could be woven together to create a timeline, or perhaps lifeline, highlighting the pain and suffering Black Dominicans of Haitian descent have endured as they fight back against the Dominican state’s “social management” of their lives and deaths. I did not have to imagine what parts of their stories should be told because the stories of these individuals now existed as they had chosen for them to be told. Their stories when woven together were the body Angela once described, and each story shared during that workshop was part of Reconoci.do’s organs. When woven together, perhaps these stories would sound like this:

He resisted by being born and surviving illnesses and diseases that killed so many other babies in his community. As a Haitian-Dominican woman she resisted by working alongside her brother and father in the sugar cane fields. In school, she resisted when she was told she was a *maldita hatiana*, damn Haitian. In the hospital, she resisted by demanding that her child be seen even after the staff told her that Haitians were taking over all of the hospital services. She resisted when her husband tried to beat her because she wanted to go back to school. They resisted on the streets of Santo Domingo when they refused to show the cop their cedula because he was not asking anyone else for theirs. They resisted against the government by standing in front of their electoral board offices releasing balloons that represented their desire to live freely as citizens of their country. They resisted by waking up and breathing this morning. They resisted when they wrote their own stories of survival. They resist by ensuring that even as they are figuratively and literally dying they have dignified funerals (Reconoci.do 2017).

Reconoci.do would often refer to themselves as the affected (*los afectados*). *Los afectados* was shorthand for a plethora of experiences that unified these individuals as stateless or at risk of becoming stateless. Being affected meant not having identity documents or being in the process of fighting in order not to lose them. To be affected by an event refers to the act of being impacted, in this case harmfully, by the actions of the Dominican government. I want to think of affect in this case as well in terms of emotions. Affect, or *afecto*, also points to the range of emotions and care that an individual might express for another. While it was meant to point to the impact on their lives as individuals made invisible by the Dominican state apparatus, I also want to think about the labor of care and commitment that the movement and its members have developed as part of their response to these racist policies. In other words, they were afectados by the racist policies enacted and supported by the state and its officials, but they were also affected by the relationships and care that they developed for one another. In these moments in which they find their lives in a legal limbo, they are there to care for each other. This care work emerged out of great precarity but also out of a sense of responsibility for the movement and its members. After an intense workshop in which the participants were asked to share painful moments in

Figure 4. A Reconoci.do member participating in the writing workshop. Photo courtesy of Dana Idalis Muñiz Pacheco. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
their lives, they organized a clothing swap and modeled the new outfits they had acquired. They were weathering the storm together and recognizing their mutual humanity.

RETURNING/REANDANDO

One afternoon, I traveled northwest with Angela and Minerva to Monte Plata to meet with Julio, the treasurer whose father had passed away. I wanted to know about his father—why had he decided to return to Haiti after so many years? We sat on a small bench made for children inside the little school that Julio was responsible for managing in his batey. I asked him if he thought his father knew he was dying when he decided to return to visit his family in Haiti. Julio responded:

One day he arrives at the house with his packed bag, he gives the keys to his room to my wife and I ask him: “Where are you going?” He [makes an expression of indifference], and leaves. He lasted three days with relatives in Barahona before he left for Haiti. […] [Minerva] told me that, “No, he wanted to die there,” but no, I doubt it … he had his medicine and he took it. But the emotion of returning to his village, the excitement of seeing his family again, the excitement of eating again what he used to eat … did not allow him and his illness killed him. He was very excited, because when he called my wife, she told me that he sounded very excited and that made me fearful.

Un día llega a la casa con bultos preparados, le entrega las llaves de la habitación a mi esposa y le pregunto: “¿Para dónde vas?”, me hace [una expresión de indiferencia], y se va. Duró tres días con unos familiares ahí en Barahona después se fue para Haití … [Minerva] me decía eso, “no él quería morir allá”, pero no … lo dudo porque él andaba con la medicina de tomar y tomó esa medicina. Pero la emoción de volver a su pueblo, la emoción de volver a ver a su familia, la emoción de volver a comer lo que él comía, no lo permitió y la enfermedad lo mató por eso. Él estaba muy emocionado, porque cuando él llamó a mi esposa me dijo que lo escuchaba muy emocionado y eso me provocó temor.

Julio does not seem to think that his father had planned to die in Haiti. Perhaps the question I had posed and the comments made by Minerva were taken in literal terms. Perhaps he did not intend to die in Haiti, but what does his father’s return to Haiti and imminent death reveal? I want to do some imagining about Julio’s father’s return to Haiti. I imagine this return as a form of recognition for him. One that he was not allowed even after working in the sugar cane fields of the Dominican Republic until his retirement. One that had ended his zombification, allowing him to be recognized and return to his family and home. The racist Dominican state had refused to recognize him. His diabetes was most likely the result of limited access to healthy food. He had not allowed the racist state, however, to dictate his death.

When I finished talking to Julio that afternoon, Angela invited us to visit her mother. As we drove down the bumpy unpaved road, Angela would point out the different parts of the town that she would have to travel to in order to fetch water, wash clothes by the river, gather wood, or take food to her family working in the sugar cane fields. Angela explained that all of the green areas we were seeing were once full of sugar cane until 2004, when sugar cane production in the area ceased. The area that we were traveling through seemed to have been taken over by grass. As she told us these stories, she chuckled and said that our trip down these roads was a form of returning, reandando, a spiritual travel experienced by people when they are dying. The concept of reandando was not new to me. I often heard my mother speak of the loved ones who had come to visit her, signaling their imminent deaths. I wondered, then, how family members and loved ones who had never left the island could possibly visit our five-story walk-up in New York City. Suffice it to say, I was not interested in being visited by anyone in the process of reandando.

Angela explained that when the body is in the process of dying the spirit returns to every place it has ever visited. She then laughed and noted that for some people the process of visiting every place they ever went to would be quite long. I understood her words as also being a commentary on all that she had traveled, marched, and continued to actively fight for. Angela was physically well, and yet, this reandando she spoke of was an indication of the spaces of liminality in which Black Dominicans of Haitian descent existed as ghosts, zombies, or muer-tos civiles. It was this ambiguity that perhaps led her talk about these travels and experiences in her life as those of someone who is dying, or on the way to another form of life. In this process of reandando our ability to witness and go along with her were also an opportunity for her experiences, and the Dominican state’s attempts at erasure, to be recognized.
As Reconoci.do members began accessing their documents, several of them on different occasions traveled to Haiti for the first time ever. Upon their return they would often share with excitement their experiences meeting family members and grassroots organizers and also realizing how their experiences as Black subjects in the Dominican Republic differed from those of the Haitian family members, friends, and colleagues they met on their trips. This was shared in reference to their limitations in speaking Kreyol, their choices in attire, and the food they ate. I consider these visits to Haiti as a form of reandando as well. Black Dominicans of Haitian descent who are in the process of dying get to visit their parents’ or grandparents’ home and gain a form of recognition that perhaps no longer marks them as zombies. In their case, however, they return to the Dominican Republic, often reinvigorated and committed to continue fighting for those who remain muertos cíveis.

I began this article by sharing a quote by Sonia Pierre, one of the most vocal and well-known Black Dominican women of Haitian descent to actively denounce the denationalization practices of the Dominican state. In 2010, Sonia died of a heart attack, but many say she died of heartache caused by the Dominican state’s constant threats of denationalization against her and her community. Sonia did not live to see the effects of La Sentencia, but her friends and colleagues often wonder how she would have dealt with that blow. Many worried that Sonia’s passing would mark a void in the movement, and many contend that there has not been another Sonia since. Such arguments, however, ignore the collective leadership that Black Dominican women such as Sonia have fostered. As Sonia stated, she might not make it to the end of the road, but her words continue to travel and return from the sugar cane plantations to Geneva through the present-day leaders who continue to advocate for their recognition.

As hyperinvisible subjects vulnerable to racial profiling and deportation, at the same time that they are deemed invisible by policies that strip them of their national identity, Dominicans of Haitian descent are constantly negotiating their presence within Dominican society. Through the enactment of racist government policies, they have been rendered muertos cíveis who are also experiencing alarming rates of physical death. Through their mortuary rituals and practices of remembrance, however, I have argued that the Reconoci.do movement has developed strategies to resist against their figurative and physical deaths, transforming the figures of the zombie and muerto civil into undead beings with the possibility to regenerate themselves through their mobilizations and affection for one another.

Sylvia Wynter notes that the slave plantation became a central component to the mechanism through which the logic of Man had been working itself out for the past five hundred years (Scott 2000, 165). Yet even within such a totalizing project, the enslaved had their own plot where they grew food for subsistence and carried over another conception of the human. Wynter argues that the slave plot continues to exist as a threat: “It speaks to other possibilities. And it is out of that plot that the new and now planetary-wide popular musical humanism of our times is emerging” (Scott 2000, 165). While Reconoci.do is unable to successfully achieve legal and social recognition from the Dominican state, through their activism they have begun to recognize their own humanity. Black Dominicans of Haitian descent are living within the wake. By mourning and calling on their dead and dying, Reconoci.do imagines and embodies an afterworld of possibilities.

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NOTES
1. All translations provided are my own unless stated otherwise.

3. Pseudonyms have been provided for all members of the Reconoci.do movement.


7. During my ethnographic research period, I witnessed several cases in which individuals reached out to Reconoci.do’s leaders for support after being picked up by immigration officials in raids. Oftentimes they were detained in a recreational center turned detention center in the Haina region until someone could provide proof that the person was a Dominican national. In some cases when individuals were taken to the border and into camps, it would take media pressure and the support of well-connected individuals for the person to be released.

8. In 2014, during the Second Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Summit in Cuba, the president of the Dominican Republic, Danilo Medina, denied accusations of racism after the retroactive denationalization of Black Dominicans of Haitian descent by noting that most of the country was comprised of Blacks and Mulattoes. Video posted by the Dominican Republic’s National Migration Office on YouTube, beginning at eight minutes. Accessed January 21, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GNrJGn5yoQ.


10. Kimberly Eison Simmons explains that in-dio in the Dominican Republic is understood as a color of in betweenness: A color that is not white or black (2009, 37).


15. See note 11.


17. Browne (2015) traces surveillance practices to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and elucidates how policies such as the eighteenth-century “lantern laws,” which required Black, mixed-race, and indigenous people to illuminate themselves at night, in order to observe, control, and maintain racial boundaries, are transformed into present-day requirements to carry legal identity documents and other forms of biometrics.


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